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## **Governance of Chinese professional football during Xi's authoritarian era: What is changing and what remains unchanged**

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### **Abstract**

This article sought to answer questions concerning the aspects that are changing and those that remains unchanged regarding football in China during Xi's authoritarian era by comparing the governance of Chinese professional football during this era and during a previously examined former era to provide a point of departure for empirical studies concerning the recent ascent of football in China. This research yielded the following findings. Regarding the first question, first, at the league-governance level, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) has prioritized the salience of professional football clubs (PFCs). Second, at the club-governance level, the CFA has adopted a gradualist approach to institutional reform by proceeding through a process of introducing private or state-owned enterprises. Third, also at the club-governance level, PFCs face financial fragility due to the heavy dependence on soft loans from backing enterprises. Regarding the second question, at the league-governance level, the actual goal setting remains unchanged, and underachievement of the national football team persists. Comprehensive document analysis that included international peer-reviewed journal articles, books or book chapters, academic reports, policy documents, and influential media in China was performed. In addition, website research on all sixteen clubs in the Chinese Super League (CSL) during the 2019 season was conducted.

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## Introduction

After two millennia of imperial rule, Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty (the final dynasty), abdicated his position in 1912.<sup>1</sup> Since assuming office in late 2012, a hundred years later, Xi Jinping reinforced the power surrounding him and enacted numerous new authoritarian rules aiming to tighten central control.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in the economic sphere, to realize ‘*economic security*’, the dominant role of the state in steering economic success was reaffirmed.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, with the removal of state and party term limits, Xi Jinping can remain in power beyond the originally stipulated two five-year tenures.<sup>4</sup> During Xi’s authoritarian era, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) tends to set highly ambitious long-term goals. The long-term planning horizon reflects consistency in policy making in light of the stable leadership position.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the political context, in the economic context, which has confronted an economic downturn after three decades of rapid economic growth, the PRC opted to proactively realign the traditional manufacturing-led model.<sup>6</sup> The PRC has become the manufacturing workshop of the world, just as Great Britain was in the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The service industry, which was previously regarded as a nonproductive industry,<sup>8</sup> was prioritized as a new pillar of the economy. Notably, this policy shift exerted a profound influence on sport policy in China. The sport industry has been identified as a fruitful area for implementing this service-oriented economy policy.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the new policy pertaining to sport development is strategically linked to economic policy and attempts to benefit from private investment and greater commercialization.<sup>10</sup> This link can be interpreted as a ‘*policy mix*’ and has resulted in an approach similar to the Western approach to sport governance.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, the central government of the PRC regards professional football in China as a wealth generator in the service-led economy, as has been more explicitly manifested by the

enactment of the *Guidelines on the Promotion of Sport Industry and Sport Consumption*<sup>12</sup> and *Outline of Establishing a World Sports Power*.<sup>13</sup> In line with the argument by Tan et al.,<sup>14</sup> football plays a pacesetter role in the sport industry. In the history of Chinese sport development, this is the first time that football has been elevated to the national strategy level.<sup>15</sup>

The governance of professional football is not independent of the wider political and economic contexts. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully examine the governance of Chinese professional football against the aforementioned new political and economic contexts during Xi's authoritarian era. However, notably, this topic has been subject to a dearth of academic analyses. Fragmented descriptions can be found either within broader topics regarding professional football in China<sup>16</sup> or institutional analyses of the former era.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the intent of this article is to fill a gap in the literature and provide a starting point for empirical studies on China's recent football ascent. This study rests on the comparison with the governance of Chinese professional football during the former era, which has been examined by scholars, and fills the gap by answering two questions: (1) what is changing; and (2) what remains unchanged during Xi's authoritarian era. Specifically, inspired by the authoritative chapter published by Gerrard,<sup>18</sup> examination herein of the governance of Chinese professional football was divided into the league-governance and the club-governance levels.

## **Research methods**

Corroborating the insight provided by Merriam,<sup>19</sup> reviewing prior studies is one of the most prevalent approaches to historical research. The present study mainly relies on a document analysis<sup>20</sup> primarily based on international peer-reviewed journal articles.

Chinese professional football development has attracted a relatively high level of attention from the international academic community. This attention is manifested by

the growing number of special journal issues organized by high-profile researchers, such as '*Football in China: Vision, Policy, Strategy and Management*' edited by David Cockayne, Simon Chadwick and Jonathan Sullivan.<sup>21</sup> Thus, emerging international peer-reviewed journal articles are expected to be instrumental in providing ample data for this research.

Specifically, relevant international peer-reviewed journal articles were identified by applying the usual electronic search strategies to Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) journals and by using other academic search engines (most notably www.tandfonline.com). In addition, the snowboarding technique was used in the search process.<sup>22</sup> However, as mentioned in the Introduction section, most articles focus on broader topics or institutional analyses of the former era. Overall, eighteen international articles were selected for thorough readings. Moreover, these international peer-reviewed journal articles were complemented with five books or book chapters, one report from an academic institution, and policy documents. The documents used in the analysis were also derived from mainstream media, such as China Daily and Sohu. Finally, website research<sup>23</sup> was conducted on all 16 PFCs in the CSL, the top-tier professional football division in China, during the 2019 season. Valuable information regarding the owners of the CSL clubs was gathered and is reported in Table 1.

*[Table 1 near here]*

## **Findings: what is changing?**

### *At the league-governance level*

On August 22, 2019, the 11th Membership Conference was held at the Xianghe National Football Training Centre in Hebei Province. Chen Xuyuan was elected as president, and Du Zhaocai, Gao Hongbo and Sun Wen were selected as vice

presidents.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the former era, during which all CFA presidents were government ‘*insiders*’ (i.e., key political leaders appointed by the General Administration of Sport),<sup>25</sup> Chen Xuyuan, the new leader, is the former president of the Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG) and the owner of Shanghai SIPG FC.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in contrast to Ma and Kurscheidt’s<sup>27</sup> observation that PFC representatives had no voting rights, the 11th Membership Conference included PFC representatives in the voting process.<sup>28</sup>

The more prominent role of the PFCs has also been manifested in the setting of ‘*policy clarification*’ meetings before the implementation stage of a new policy.<sup>29</sup> Instead of coercively and unilaterally ordering PFCs to perfectly implement a new policy, the new CFA has opted to actively negotiate with the PFCs, striving to reach an agreement prior to policy implementation.<sup>30</sup> Notably, the ‘*policy cycle*’ models proposed by policy scholars<sup>31</sup> facilitate a better understanding of this change. The following six stages are included in the policy cycle: agenda setting; policy formulation; legitimation; implementation; monitoring and evaluation; and policy maintenance, succession or termination.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, ‘*policy clarification*’ meetings at which the approval of political parties and the support of interest groups was ensured were identified as having occurred during the legitimation stage.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, a total of 35 people were elected to the largest ever executive committee.<sup>34</sup> It is noteworthy that among these committee members, the number of civil servants working in sport governing bodies was significantly reduced.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, more representatives, such as school football, the media, football referees, and fans, have been<sup>36</sup> included to attempt to cover more stakeholders in the Chinese professional football landscape.

In summary, compared with the former era, during Xi's authoritarian era, the PFCs have been empowered to vote for the new president. Currently, the CFA is led by a new president who is not a government '*insider*' and prefers to negotiate with the PFCs rather than coercively command compliance. Hence, professional football '*policies*' can be distinguished from '*decisions*'. The new executive committee incorporates stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, and the number of civil servants working in sport governing bodies has decreased. In the next section, changes taking place at the club-governance level are elucidated.

### ***At the club-governance level***

#### *The intensified 'capitalist' element*

During the former era, at the level of club governance, the PFCs were owned by Provincial Sport Bureaus (PSBs, e.g., Mianyang Fanhua FC) or jointly owned by the PSBs and enterprises (state-owned or private, e.g., Shandong Luneng Taishan).<sup>37</sup> The PSBs were consistent in exerting considerable influence on the day-to-day operations of PFCs.<sup>38</sup> State-owned enterprises (SOEs) or private enterprises (PEs) that participated in PFC ownership were perceived solely as financial burden-sharing entities. In particular, regarding the SOEs, Amara et al.<sup>39</sup> indicated that sponsorships by SOEs were simply another form of public subsidies. Against this background, a key feature of the governance of professional football in China during the former era was the oft-quoted '*restricted capitalism*'.<sup>40</sup>

Under '*restricted capitalism*', the *Jia-A league* found itself tightly encircled with severe governance challenges particularly relevant to the problems of compliance (i.e., corruption and match fixing).<sup>41</sup> Of particular note is that the most vigorous official response was to straightforwardly abandon the *Jia-A league* and launch a new league.<sup>42</sup>

Surprisingly, corruption and match fixing issues were not thoroughly investigated until 2009 (i.e., five years after the establishment of the new league, the CSL). At least one hundred people from the PFCs and the CFA were subsequently involved.<sup>43</sup>

As shown in Table 1, during Xi's authoritarian era, compared with the former era, the PFCs in China eliminated the *less hidden* governmental control of the PSBs; instead, acquisition of these clubs by SOEs or private enterprises (PEs), mainly firms in the real estate industry, was permitted and promoted.<sup>44</sup> One exception was the Tianjin Tianhai FC because its investor was sentenced to nine years in prison for organizing a pyramid scheme.<sup>45</sup> It is evident that at the level of club governance, the '*capitalist*' element has been intensified by the entry of SOEs and PEs.<sup>46</sup> Against this backdrop, Ma and Kurscheidt<sup>47</sup> proposed the notion of the '*Westernization of Football*' to indicate that the PRC mimics the governance of professional football in Western countries to benefit from private investment and greater commercialization of professional football.

Regarding the interpretation of the intensified '*capitalist*' element at the club-governance level, as is often the case in China, investments are often embedded in politicized relationships.<sup>48</sup> From the perspective of PEs, the act of investing in Chinese professional football serves as a practical '*stepping stone*' to obtain access to inestimable governmental support well represented by tax reductions and preferential policies; this phenomenon attests to the argument by Yu et al.<sup>49</sup> As shown in Figure 1, for '*skilful*' real-estate enterprises in particular, the redeployment of scarce land-use rights government was of higher value than the soft loans given to the PFCs.<sup>50</sup> This view is also shared by Sullivan,<sup>51</sup> who claimed that investing in Chinese professional football has been instrumented as a feasible approach to promoting a '*strategic partnership*' with the government in pursuit of implementing government-led initiatives to enhance the performance of the national football team. In contrast to investment by

PEs, investments by SOEs are equivalent to public subsidies, which is similar to the former era.<sup>52</sup>

*[Figure 1 near here]*

In summary, at the club-governance level, the ‘*capitalist*’ element has been underpinned by the entry of enterprise actors. However, the euphoria of the injection of soft loans from backing enterprises was attributed to the ‘*strategic partnership*’ with the government. The perception of PFCs as units generating positive financial spillovers for backing enterprises is pervasive. In the next section, the emphasis is placed on the substantive problem of financial fragility that could short-circuit professional football development in China.

### *Financial fragility*

In more developed markets in Western countries, since the late 1970s, the penetration of market-driven ideals has brought profit-making to the forefront of football, which has unreservedly embraced the key tenets of liberal market economics and sought to maximize returns by commercializing the product.<sup>53</sup> It is evident from Figure 2 that a real commercialization ideal developed among the fan base. The more classical sources of club income stem from tickets, broadcasting and sponsoring.<sup>54</sup> The PFCs shoulder the responsibility for enlarging ‘*grassroots custodians*’<sup>55</sup> (i.e., a local fan base or even ‘*satellite fan*’ bases; Business to Client, B2C), which, in turn, attracts sponsors (i.e., broadcasting enterprises; Business to Business, B2B).<sup>56</sup>

*[Figure 2 near here]*

Here lies the great difference between the Chinese football market and the more developed markets in Western countries. The 2016 financial report of the CSL briefly stated that ticket sales are responsible for only 0.6% of the overall revenue, the broadcasting fee accounts for 1%, and sponsorship’s market share is 22%.<sup>57</sup> In the

Chinese context, Table 1 reveals a sobering picture. Starting from Guangzhou Evergrande's acquisition of Guangzhou FC in 2010, the survival of CSL clubs has been heavily reliant on soft loans from backing the PEs or SOEs.<sup>58</sup> Without these soft loans, the CSL would be in the red almost every year.<sup>59</sup> Of particular note is large-scale disbandment of the PFCs in second- and third-tier leagues in China.<sup>60</sup> It has been reported that over the last two years, a total of 19 PFCs severely plagued by financial issues have officially withdrawn from second- and third-tier leagues.<sup>61</sup>

Undoubtedly, financial stability is a relative term. Most developed markets in Western countries are not free of concerns related to real or potential threats to financial stability. For instance, these clubs indulge in a genuine arms race and '*overspend*' on talent.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, despite the drastic oversimplification, it seems that most professional football leagues that enjoy more financial stability are not solely dependent on the injection of soft loans.

In addition, the greater financial fragility of Chinese PFCs is evidenced by the following: (1) the financial stability of the CSL clubs is closely associated with that of the real-estate industry since most investors are engaged in the real-estate industry (see Table 1), and since the Chinese real-estate industry is in danger of bursting,<sup>63</sup> the financial fragility of the CSL clubs is increasing; and (2) as noted by Ma and Kurscheidt,<sup>64</sup> the ever-present threat is that main private investors will stop offering soft loans to the clubs after their main businesses have been reinforced.

### **Findings: what remains unchanged?**

The significance of Chinese football was demonstrated in the landmark three wishes by then-vice president Xi Jinping in 2011: 'qualifying for another FIFA World Cup, hosting a FIFA World Cup, and inscribing the PRC on the trophy'.<sup>65</sup> Notably, there was a remarkable resemblance between Xi's three wishes and the counterparts relevant to

the Olympic Games. In specific terms, in 1908, three wishes pertaining to the Olympic Games were provoked in *Tientsin Young Men*: ‘participating in the Olympics, winning an Olympic gold medal, and hosting the Olympic Game’.<sup>66</sup>

Since the PRC’s re-engagement in the international sporting community in the late 1970s, there has been a general consensus amongst researchers on the PRC’s political use of the Olympics.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the PRC’s political use of football cannot be underrated. It is worth noting that after the communists won against the Nationalists and founded the PRC in 1949, Chinese Communist leaders demonstrated no hesitation in inviting the Shengyan Football Team to Beijing to play in the celebration of the newly established communist regime.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Manzenreiter and Horne<sup>69</sup> proposed the concept of the ‘*Footballization of China*’, which makes reference to the political use of football to fulfill non-sporting political objectives imposed on football. Thus, as one of the most popular sports worldwide, football was deemed an instrument to exhibit the general modernization of the PRC and assert the country’s own brand of ideological and political principles in ruling the world’s largest population.<sup>70</sup> In a similar vein, other authoritarian regimes, particularly countries in the Gulf, have reached an agreed-upon understanding of football in which football is perceived as a valuable vehicle for political objectives.<sup>71</sup>

Notably, several researchers have insisted that the Olympics are perceived by the PRC as a well-established symbol for educating domestic Chinese rather than the international community.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Junior and Rodrigues<sup>73</sup> argued that after successfully challenging the dominance of the USA at the Summer Olympics, the PRC started its catch-up process in the world of football aiming to topple the current ‘*Eurocentrism*’ of football. It is likewise arguable that the political exploitation of

football places greater emphasis on the domestic Chinese population than on the international community. However, compared with most developed nations, the relatively closed PRC cannot be immune to the ‘*world of internet and global satellite news*’. In other words, drawing support from worldwide internet and global satellite news, people all over the world will be familiar with the PRC as it is, rather than as it wishes to be. Moreover, that is also the underlying rationale of the endless negative press pertaining to its previous poor identification, poor human rights and authoritarian rule.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the effectiveness of the ‘*Footballization of China*’ strategy remains questionable.

In summary, at the league-governance level, actual goal setting continues to arrest the unrelenting decline of the national football team, as determined based on the ‘*Footballization of China*’ strategy. Achieving the ‘*Footballization of China*’ strategy requires international performances of the Chinese national football team. The PRC has long experienced a discrepancy between football underachievement and its status as a superpower. However, with globalization and the prevalence of information and communication technologies considered collectively, there remains a question mark concerning the effectiveness of the ‘*Footballization of China*’ strategy.

## **Conclusions**

The following two key aspects of the governance of Chinese professional football directed this research: the league-governance level and the club-governance level.

During Xi’s authoritarian era, compared with the former era, the PFCs attached greater importance to the league-governance level. At the club-governance level, it is arguable that the CFA opted to follow a gradualist approach regarding the entry of PEs and SOEs. However, at present, the heavy dependency of the PFCs in China on soft loans from backing enterprises rendered these clubs more fragile than their Western

counterparts in financial terms. Finally, what remains unchanged is the actual goal setting at the league-governance level for fulfilling the '*Footballization of China*' strategy. The CFA has long been preoccupied with the pursuit of improving the performance and competitiveness of the national football team.

Over the passing decades, a number of CFA presidents have consistently promised to provide a better governance framework and more effective government support. Guided by the newly elected president, who is not a government '*insider*', the CFA, as a focal organization, appears to be carefully assessing stakeholder importance within the Chinese professional football landscape. The salience of the PFCs has been gradually prioritized. Moreover, school football representatives are now formally included in the executive committee; this inclusion may be a sign that the blueprint for a '*bottom-up*' approach that pumps money into school football and enables football to be a sport that is truly accessible for student participation has matured.

At the club-governance level, with the introduction of Guangzhou Evergrande as an entrepreneur, the situation of club governance has been spoiled or damaged. In stark contrast to other long-standing PSB-owned or collectively owned clubs during the previous era, which have been reviewed in research by Amara et al.,<sup>75</sup> purely privately owned PFCs have emerged. Such innovation has been recognized as a way to facilitate the spread of the '*capitalist*' element amid the PFCs in China. However, because the commercialization of professional football in China remains in its infancy, reliance on soft loans from backing enterprises has raised the level of financial fragility that affects PFCs.

Concerning the second question, what remains unchanged regarding the governance of Chinese professional football during Xi's authoritarian era, the notion of '*Footballization of China*' is highlighted. In particular, considering Xi's three wishes

for Chinese football, unsurprisingly, at the league-governance level, the actual goal setting remains unchanged; promotion of the performance of the national football team is in its primacy. Furthermore, it is arguable that the '*Footballization of China*' strategy primarily targets a domestic audience to shore up domestic political legitimacy.

The findings during Xi's authoritarian era are informative for decision makers evaluating the competitiveness of Chinese professional football. The leaders of the CFA are expected to move PFCs away from the euphoria of injections of soft loans. Related policies guiding PFCs to give primacy to their fans should be enacted. For foreign PFCs, Chinese PFCs should be perceived as forceful competitors in the global football market. Finally, foreign football investors are encouraged to 'reconcile' potential business proposals with fulfilment of the '*Footballization of China*' strategy.

It is always difficult to present a complete and unanimous answer to the questions regarding what is changing and what remains unchanged concerning the governance of Chinese professional football in a new era. This research attempts to minimize criticism and demonstrate relatively critical findings by following the dichotomous approach (league-governance level and club-governance level) authoritatively employed by Gerrard.<sup>76</sup> However, concerns can still be raised regarding missing key findings concerning the aforementioned two questions. This research may serve as a reference for static or institutional analyses of Chinese professional football (e.g., by researchers investigating current governance structures, networks and regulations). Moreover, this research may shed light on the dynamic analysis of organizational change in Chinese professional football by introducing a potentially new structure. One promising direction for future research resides on the demand side (i.e., supporters/fans) of Chinese professional football. Corresponding to the distinct socioeconomic environment of the Chinese football industry, it can be speculated that

Chinese football fans are very different from Western football fans, which warrants more empirical evidence to confirm this speculation.

## **Disclosure statement**

## **Data availability statement**

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Lin and Blanchard, 'Governance, Domestic Change', 1–20.
- <sup>2</sup> Kostka and Nahm, 'Central-Local Relations'.
- <sup>3</sup> Grix, Brannagan, and Lee, *Entering the Global Arena*, 71.
- <sup>4</sup> Sullivan, Chadwick, and Gow, 'China's Football Dream'.
- <sup>5</sup> Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Governance of the Chinese Super League'.
- <sup>6</sup> Sullivan, Chadwick, and Gow, 'China's Football Dream', 494.
- <sup>7</sup> Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 16.
- <sup>8</sup> Ho and Lo, 'The Service Industry in China'.
- <sup>9</sup> Liu, Zhang, and Desbordes, 'Sport Business in China'; Jinming Zheng et al., *Sport Policy in China*, 113.
- <sup>10</sup> Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Governance of the Chinese Super League', 5; Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Doing it the Chinese Way'.
- <sup>11</sup> Kurscheidt and Deitersen-Wieber, 'Sport Governance in Germany', 259–306.
- <sup>12</sup> Junior and Rodrigues, 'The Chinese Plan for Football Development'; Liu, Zhang, and Desbordes, 'Sport Business in China', 6.
- <sup>13</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 'Outline of Establishing'.
- <sup>14</sup> Tan et al., 'Xi Jin-Ping's World Cup Dreams'.
- <sup>15</sup> Peng, Skinner, and Houlihan, 'An Analysis of the Chinese Football Reform of 2015'.
- <sup>16</sup> Liu, 'The Regulation of Chinese Professional Football'; Tian, 'China's "G-7 Revolution"'; Liu, Chen, and Newman, 'The Football Dream of a Sleeping Dragon'; Liu and Schwarz, 'Assessing the Community Beliefs'.
- <sup>17</sup> Huang, Xiao, and Zhang, 'Not All "The Evils of Capitalism"'; Fan and Lu, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation'; Amara et al., 'The Governance of Professional Soccer'.
- <sup>18</sup> Gerrard, 'Media Ownership of Teams'.
- <sup>19</sup> Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education*.
- <sup>20</sup> Bowen, 'Document Analysis'; Li, Pitts, and Quarterman, *Research Methods*.
- <sup>21</sup> Idrottsforum.org, 'Call for Papers'.

- <sup>22</sup> Copper, *Synthesizing Research*.
- <sup>23</sup> Skinner, Edwards, Corbett, *Research Methods*.
- <sup>24</sup> China Daily, 'Chen Xuyuan Elected New President'.
- <sup>25</sup> Fan and Lu, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation', 1642.
- <sup>26</sup> China Daily, 'Chen Xuyuan Elected New President of Chinese Football Association'.
- <sup>27</sup> Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Governance of the Chinese Super League', 13.
- <sup>28</sup> China Daily, 'Chen Xuyuan Elected New President of Chinese Football Association'.
- <sup>29</sup> China Daily, 'CFA Works to Improve'.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Derg, 'Evaluation and Termination'; John, *Analysing Public Policy*.
- <sup>32</sup> Strittmatter, 'Legitimation Processes of Sport Organizations'.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>34</sup> People, 'Chen Xuyuan Elected New President'.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Amara et al., 'The Governance of Professional Soccer', 195; Huang, Xiao, and Zhang, 'Not All "The Evils of Capitalism"', 286.
- <sup>38</sup> Fan and Lu, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation', 1642.
- <sup>39</sup> Amara et al., 'The Governance of Professional Soccer', 195.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 203.
- <sup>41</sup> Fan and Lu, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation', 1637.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1638.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1646.
- <sup>44</sup> Sullivan, Chadwick, and Gow, 'China's Football Dream', 506.
- <sup>45</sup> China Daily, 'Founder of Quanjian Sentenced'.
- <sup>46</sup> Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Governance of the Chinese Super League', 14; Yu et al., 'The Transition Game'.
- <sup>47</sup> Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Governance of the Chinese Super League', 20.
- <sup>48</sup> Hsiao-Tung Fei et al., *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society*; Graham and Lam, 'The Chinese Negotiation'.
- <sup>49</sup> Yu et al., 'The Transition Game', 726.
- <sup>50</sup> Sullivan, Chadwick, and Gow, 'China's Football Dream', 500.
- <sup>51</sup> Sullivan, *China's Football Dream*.
- <sup>52</sup> Amara et al., 'The Governance of Professional Soccer', 195.
- <sup>53</sup> Dubal, 'The Neoliberalization of Football'.
- <sup>54</sup> Morrow, *The People's Game*.
- <sup>55</sup> Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs'.

- <sup>56</sup> Morrow, *The People's Game*, 15.
- <sup>57</sup> Yan, 'Chinese Football Super League'.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Ifeng, '19 Clubs Quit from the Second- and Third-Tier Leagues'.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Franck, 'Private Firm, Public Corporation'.
- <sup>63</sup> Trott, 'Grassroots Governance Reform'.
- <sup>64</sup> Ma and Kurscheidt, 'Governance of the Chinese Super League', 21.
- <sup>65</sup> Ma and Kurscheit, 'Modifying Tradition'; Tan et al., 'Xi Jin-Ping's World Cup Dreams', 1450.
- <sup>66</sup> Fan, Wu and Xiong, 'Beijing Ambitions'.
- <sup>67</sup> Green and Houlihan, 'Conclusion'; Tan and Bairner, 'Globalization and Chinese Sport Policy';  
Hu and Henry, 'Reform and Maintenance of Juguo Tizhi'.
- <sup>68</sup> Dong and Mangan, 'Football in the New China'.
- <sup>69</sup> Manzenreiter and Horne, 'Playing the Post-Fordist Game in/to the Far East'.
- <sup>70</sup> Connell, 'Globalisation, Soft Power'.
- <sup>71</sup> Sullivan, Chadwick, and Gow, 'China's Football Dream', 494.
- <sup>72</sup> Giulianotti, 'The Beijing 2008 Olympics'; Brownell, *Beijing's Games*'; Manzenreiter, 'The  
Beijing Games in the Western Imagination of China'.
- <sup>73</sup> Junior and Rodrigues, 'The Chinese Plan for Football Development', 64.
- <sup>74</sup> Grix, Brannagan, and Lee, *Entering the Global Arena*, 78; Ma and Kurscheit, 'Modifying  
Tradition'.
- <sup>75</sup> Amara et al., 'The Governance of Professional Soccer', 196.
- <sup>76</sup> Gerrard, 'Media Ownership of Teams', 257.

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## Tables

Table 1. Owners and key figures of the CSL clubs (season 2019).

Club name	Owner	Main business	Private enterprise	State-owned enterprise
Beijing Renhe	Renhe Commercial Holdings Co., Ltd.	Real-estate	Yes	No
Beijing Sinobo Guoan	Sinobo Group (64%); CITIC Group (36%)	Real-estate; Finance, Energy	Yes (Sinobo Group)	Yes (CITIC Group)
Chongqing SWM	Desports (90%); Lifan Group (10%)	Sports marketing, Automobiles, Real-estate	Yes	No
Dalian Yifang	Yifang Group	Real-estate	Yes	No
Guangzhou Evergrande Taobao FC	Evergrande Real Estate Group (56.71%); Alibaba Group (37.81%)	Real-estate, E-commerce	Yes	No
Guangzhou R&F	Guangzhou R&F Properties Co., Ltd.	Real-estate	Yes	No
Hebei CFFC	China Fortune Land Development Co., Ltd.	Real-estate	Yes	No
Henan Jianye	Jianye Residential Group	Real-estate	Yes	No
Jiangsu Suning	Suning Appliance Group	Retail, Real estate	Yes	No
Shandong Luneng Taishan	Luneng Group	Electric power, Real-estate	No	Yes
Shanghai Greenland Shenhua	Greenland Group	Real-estate	Yes	No
Shanghai SIPG	Shanghai International Port Group	Port operation, Real-estate	No	Yes
Shenzhen Kaisa	Kaisa Group	Real-estate	Yes	No
Tianjin Tianhai	Tianjin Sport Bureau (Temporary)	Governmental agency	No	No
Tianjin Taida	TEDA Investment Holding Co., Ltd.	Real-estate, Urban planning	No	Yes
Wuhan Zall	Zall Holdings Co., Ltd.	Logistics, Real-estate	Yes	No

## Figures

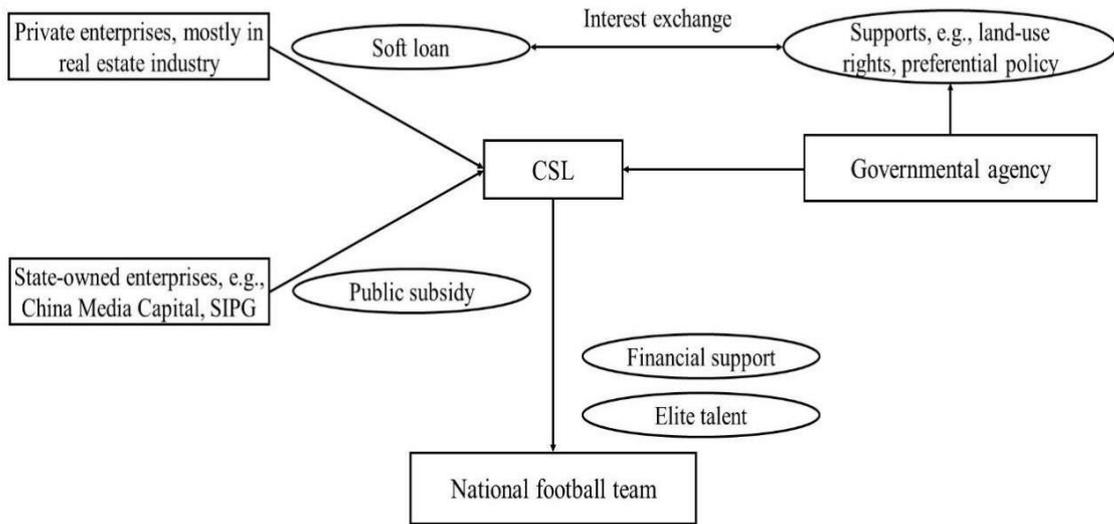


Figure 1

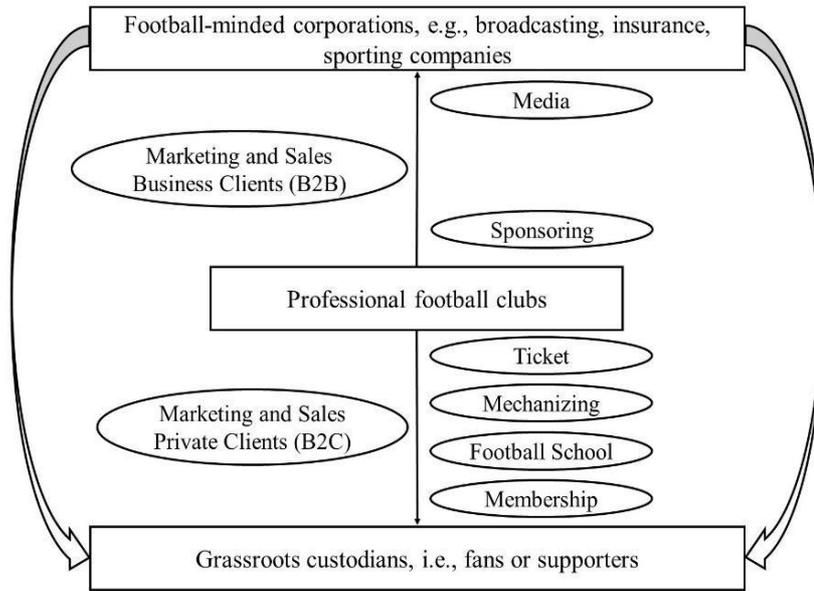


Figure 2

## **Figure captions**

Figure 1. The current Chinese model of the commercialisation of professional football.

Source: See note 46 above

Figure 2. The commercialisation model of professional football in more developed Western markets.

Source: See note 54 above